

Thursday January 25, 2007

EXHIBIT 23
DATE 1-25
HB Comm Services

Madame Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Jenece Jacobs-Sharkey I am a Director of Opportunity Resources, Inc. in Missoula. ORI is a non-profit that provides residential and vocational supports to over 350 individuals with disabilities on a daily basis. We provide supports for people who have developmental and physical disabilities as well as mental illness.

I am here today to voice my support of the 102 new slots in the new biennium for individuals to receive supports from Home and Community Based Services the need is there and individuals deserve the right to be served in their communities of choice. I also want to thank you for the 22 cents per mile increase in Medicaid mileage reimbursement. I would like the committee to consider raising the mileage reimbursement above 22 cents per mile.

Montana's community based providers of services also need rate increases this biennium. I understand that the Gov has proposed a 2.5 % increase for the 1st year of the biennium, and we are very thankful for that. I am here today to ask that you consider funding both years in the biennium in order to continue to provide quality supports to individuals with disabilities it is essential the funding is there so that we don't continue to fall behind. Our worker's comp costs are continuing to increase and the cost of doing business is getting more and more expensive. The funding for these services has not kept up. In order to maintain quality community based supports, programs need to be adequately funded.

I was here last Thursday for the DD hearings where you heard consistent testimony about the need to increase funding in order to raise wages for direct care workers. I am here today to ask you again to consider it for SLTC HCBS as well. Montana is in a direct care worker crisis and people with disabilities across the state are in desperate need of a consistent qualified caregiver workforce. Wages for direct care workers need to be increased so that we can continue to insure that we can meet the most basic needs of Montana's disabled. With that, and finally I would like to also voice my overwhelming support for ~~House~~ ^{Senate} Bill ~~206~~ ²⁰⁶ in which Health Insurance Incentives would be made available to providers of Medicaid funded programs in order to offer their direct care workers quality health insurance. Many of our Direct care workers in Montana do not have health Insurance. Please consider funding these requests, without these financial supports for our direct care work force Montana will continue to be in a serious qualified caregiver crisis.

Thank you for your consideration

Jenece Jacobs-Sharkey
Director of Services, Opportunity Resources Inc.